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Date: ~~8-28-91~~
Edition: WASHINGTON POST

Title

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29B-WF-

File: 171994-Sub
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Another Casualty in the 'Octopus' Case

Joseph Daniel Casolaro, the freelance journalist who thought he was on to the biggest story of his life—a story he called “the octopus”—is not the only investigative reporter to die while chasing the tentacles of that octopus.

Casolaro's body was found Aug. 10 in a hotel room in Martinsburg, W.Va., his wrists slashed. On March 31, 1990, the body of British journalist Jonathan Moyle was found hanging from a closet rail in his hotel room in Santiago, Chile.

Although Casolaro and Moyle were probing different leads, their investigations involved some of the same people. Both of their families are adamant in saying that each of them was the victim of foul play, not suicide, as authorities first thought in each case.

Casolaro's death attracted a flurry of news media attention to the story he had not yet finished. His octopus theory was that several of the biggest scandals of the last decade were linked in a huge master plot, but the files he left behind provided no smoking guns.

A key part of Casolaro's theory focused on the eight-year legal battle between the Justice Department and Inslaw, a Washington computer software company. Inslaw contends that Reagan administration officials pirated its software and sold it to law enforcement and intelligence agencies around the world.

According to sources who worked with Casolaro, he believed that some people involved in the alleged software theft were also involved in the Iran-contra affair, the arming of Iraqi President

Saddam Hussein before the Persian Gulf War and delaying the release of American hostages so President Jimmy Carter would lose the 1980 election (the “October surprise”). Casolaro also apparently was trying to prove that the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) was a conduit for money in some of these operations.

Casolaro believed that the conspirators he was investigating arranged for Inslaw software to be sold to Iraqi intelligence through an arms broker in Chile. Moyle, the editor of Defense Helicopter World in London, was in Chile last year to attend an international air show. As he reported last August, while he was there he was looking into weapons sales to Iraq by the same Chilean arms broker.

Moyle was more interested in allegations that the broker was buying used American-made civilian helicopters to outfit them as attack helicopters for Iraq. Moyle's notes also referred to “helios,” an advanced missile guidance system, which led many to suspect that Moyle was investigating other goodies Iraq was shopping for in addition to helicopters.

Over the past year, Casolaro contacted us several times to talk about sales to Iraq, but he appeared to be no further along in the story than any other journalist. Similarly, the details Moyle was chasing about the helicopters were well-known in defense circles. On the surface, neither man had evidence worth killing for.

There is plenty of speculation about motives for suicide in each case, but those who knew them best continue to argue that both journalists were murdered.

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